

# **A Return to Nation-Building Through Culture? The Past, Present and Futures of Australian Cultural Policy**

**Terry Flew, The University of Sydney, Australia**

**Paper presented to *Policy Futures for the Digital Creative Economy*, a  
research encounter under the ‘Creative Economy and Cultural  
transformations’ theme, University of Glasgow Advanced Research Centre,  
29-30 March 2023**

## **The past in the present: *Revive* and Labor's cultural policy meta-narrative**

One of the commitments of the Australian Labor Party led by Anthony Albanese prior to the May 2022 Australian Federal election was to develop a national cultural policy. Shortly after Labor's electoral victory, the new Minister for the Arts, Tony Burke, proclaimed that 'The nine-year political attack on the arts and entertainment sector is now over. The neglect, the contempt and the sabotage of the previous government has ended' ("The Political Attack On The Arts Over,' New Minister For The Arts Tony Burke Makes First Statement," 2022). The Albanese Labor government moved very quickly to undertake the process of developing a national cultural policy. Consultations took place over the period from July to October 2022, and over 1200 submissions were received from individual and organisations throughout the country. On 30 January 2023, at the famous Esplanade Hotel in St. Kilda, where Albanese and Burke may have seen Nick Cave and the Birthday Party at their most incendiary in the 1980s, Australia's newest cultural policy, *Revive: A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place* was launched (Australian Government, 2023).

There are several features of the new national cultural policy that are distinctive, as well as those which are recognisable from similar policies in other jurisdictions. I will return to these later in the talk. One feature of the *Revive* document is that it consistently reiterates a relationship between Federal Labor governments and cultural policy. In the Prime Minister's Foreword, Anthony Albanese claims that the policy:

builds on the proud legacy of Prime Ministers Gough Whitlam and Paul Keating, both champions of culture who recognised the vital role of the arts in developing national identity, social unity and economic success (Australian Government, 2023, p. 4).

On the following page, in the Minister for the Arts' Foreword, Tony Burke observes:

This chapter of cultural policy builds on the work commenced with the establishment of the Australia Council by the Whitlam Government, and the two previous cultural policies. Creative Nation was launched by Prime Minister Paul Keating and Arts Minister Michael Lee. Creative Australia was the product of Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Arts Minister Simon Crean (Australian Government, 2023, p. 6).

In case this point was missed, the *Revive* report proper has the statement in its Introduction that:

*Revive* builds on the important work of previous governments; it revitalises the work of Gough Whitlam who established the Australia Council as a statutory authority in 1975, continues the ambition of the Keating Government's Creative Nation of 1994, and builds on the key principles of the Gillard Government's Creative Australia of 2013 (Australian Government, 2023, p. 17).

As an empirical account of how cultural policies have actually developed in Australia, this narrative has some significant gaps. It chooses to ignore, for instance, the important role played by Liberal Party Prime Ministers such as John Gorton and Malcolm Fraser in the development of Australian screen industries. It also selectively avoids discussing the relative lack of interest of the most electorally successful Labor Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, in the arts and culture, as compared to sports, with which he had a more obvious personal affinity (MacDonnell, 1992). It also does not comment on how state governments are as important as the Federal government

in the funding of cultural activity: the lobby group A New Approach found that, excluding Covid-19 measures, the federal government contributed 37.9%, state and territory governments 36.7% and local governments 25.3% to total cultural expenditure by governments in the 2019–20 financial year (A New Approach, 2019). Some Liberal state governments, such as those in New South Wales, have been very active investors in the arts and culture.

As a narrative, however, it proposes a degree of continuity to the policies of Federal Labor governments in Australia since Whitlam's election in 1972 to the present. Gough Whitlam remains an emblematic figure in Australian politics over 50 years after his election, and the relationship of his government to the arts and cultural sectors during its three-year reign is an important part of this. You can get applause and even standing ovations at arts events in Australia by invoking Whitlam's legacy, which is not the case for any other Australian Prime Minister.<sup>1</sup> In this narrative, Labor is associated with the alignment of economic modernisation, greater integration into the Asia-Pacific region, a more independent and possibly post-colonial foreign policy, a multicultural Australia where the "mainstream" is itself culturally diverse, and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Beilharz, 1994; Johnson, 2000).

Cultural policy within this metanarrative is both the "glue" that links the nation's history and traditions with its modernised and culturally diverse future, and the basis for a new national narrative where culture contributes to both a new cosmopolitan national identity and leadership in the Asia-Pacific region. Under the Keating government, *Creative Nation* was implicitly tied to the campaign (ultimately unsuccessful) to sever ties with the British monarchy and to become a republic. In *Revive*, it is linked to First Nations recognition and the question – which

is again to be decided by a referendum on changing the Constitution of Australia – of a Voice to Parliament for First Nations people. I will return to this point later in the paper.

### **The road to *Revive*: Australian Arts and Cultural Policy 2001-2022**

The early 2000s were not a propitious time for cultural policy in Australia. The ongoing Federal electoral success of the Liberal-National Parties under John Howard, and the defeat of the 1999 referendum for Australia to become a republic, signalled an end to the ‘big picture’ thinking about cultural identity that was associated with the Paul Keating era. Howard successfully steered the Liberal Party towards a more conservative direction, signalling that he wanted Australians to be ‘relaxed and comfortable’ about both their past and their future (Brett, 2005). In terms of arts and cultural policy, the major Federal initiative in this period was greater subvention of the major performing arts companies following the Nugent Report in 2000, reinforcing a two-tier model of arts funding, where elite institutions had guaranteed funding over time whereas others had to routinely reapply and present business cases for renewed Federal funding (Craik, 2007).

It was in this period that much of the innovative thinking associated with arts and culture was coming from state governments, who sought to integrate culture into wider economic and social policy strategies (Throsby, 2008, 2010). The 2000s marks the heyday of the creative industries approach to arts and cultural policy. First proposed in the state of Queensland – traditionally not a bastion of arts and cultural initiatives – creative industries sets a template for how to broaden the remit of cultural expenditure to areas such as screen-based industries, games, and digital design, while being able to justify such expenditure, not on the traditional grounds of market failure and the inherent value of elite art forms, but upon the economic value of

creativity and the capacity of the arts and culture to address multiple policy goals (Flew, 2012). One of the key observers of Australian cultural policy, the cultural economist David Throsby, described this as a process whereby ‘governments have searched for ways to surf the wave of the new information economy, looking to the creative industries broadly defined as sources of innovation to feed economic growth and employment creation at both national and local levels’ (Throsby, 2008, p. 229). In his account of the rise of the cultural and creative industries, Throsby observed:

A focus on the cultural industries may have helped to legitimise culture in the eyes of some hard-headed economic policy-makers ... [who] have tended to be uneasy with a cultural policy whose primary focus is public assistance to the arts ... These sceptics have remained unconvinced as to the existence of public-good benefits from the arts ... [and] a market failure justification for public intervention does not impress them. But the cultural industries are a different matter. Now the arts can be seen as part of a wider and more dynamic sphere of economic activity, with links through to the information and knowledge economies, fostering creativity, embracing new technologies and feeding innovation. Cultural policy in these circumstances is rescued from its primordial past and catapulted to the forefront of the modern forward-looking policy agenda, an essential component in any respectable economic policy-maker’s development strategy (Throsby, 2008, p. 229).

This has for the most part remained the focus of state governments with regards to cultural policy. While enthusiasm for creative industries waned in Queensland – partly due to the high demand for the products of mining and extractive industries that are its traditional economic base – it was embraced in states such as Victoria, where the Arts Ministry became the Ministry

for Creative Industries, and New South Wales, where the arts portfolio would come to be administered by Create NSW.

The high point of creative industries policy discourse as a guide to Federal cultural policy was arguably *Creative Australia: National Cultural Policy*, released by the Gillard Labor government in 2013 (Australian Government, 2013). The arts and cultural sectors had high expectations of Kevin Rudd's Labor government when it came to office in 2007 (Throsby et al., 2006), and the appointment of former Midnight Oil lead singer and environmental activist Peter Garrett as Minister for the Arts and Environment, as well as the foregrounding of culture and creativity at the 2030 Summit that Prime Minister Rudd led in 2018, suggested a return to the halcyon days of Whitlam and Keating. As with many of that government's proposed initiatives, however, the development of policy got bogged down in process, and the febrile atmosphere that came to prevail in Australian politics after Rudd was deposed as leader in June 2010, and his successor Julia Gillard led a minority government that was perpetually under siege from both its political opponents and from those within the Labor caucus plotting for Rudd's return to the leadership. The policy as announced in March 2013 made familiar gestures to 'affirm[ing] the centrality of the arts to our national identity, social cohesion and economic success' (Julia Gillard, in Australian Government, 2013, p. 2), and what the then Arts Minister Simon Crean referred to as the 'economic dividend' and a 'rich cultural life' (Simon Crean, in Australian Government, 2013, p. 3). But Crean resigned the portfolio the day after launching the policy, having called on Rudd to challenge Gillard for the Labor leadership in order to end the stand-off within the Caucus, leaving his successor, Tony Burke, only six months to put some of the policy initiatives in place before Labor lost power to the Coalition, led by Tony Abbott, in September 2013.

One feature of the various Liberal-National Party governments led by Tony Abbott (2013-2016), Malcolm Turnbull (2016-2018) and Scott Morrison (2018-2022) was their relative lack of interest in arguments about the economic value of culture. Under the first Arts Minister, George Brandis, the focus was very much upon de-funding the Australia Council, and instead creating a parallel National Program for Excellence in the Arts, where peer review approaches to grant allocation would be replaced by direct allocations from the Minister's office (Eltham, 2016). The NPEA and Brandis's tenure as minister did not last, and his successor, Mitch Fifield, established an innovation-focused scheme, Catalyst, to replace the NPEA. It was only with the appointment of the Minister for Communications, Urban Infrastructure, Cities and the Arts, Paul Fletcher, that there were signs of thinking systematically about policy, with the establishment of a Creative Economy Taskforce in 2020, and a Parliamentary Inquiry into the Cultural and Creative Industries in 2021 (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts, 2021).

One of the few instances where arts funding was increased during the Coalition governments over the 2013-2022 period was the response to the impact of COVID-19.<sup>2</sup> The Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) program announced in July 2020 provided an additional \$75 million to the arts and entertainment industries. Decisions about funding were made through the Minister's office rather than the Australia Council, and the scale of funding for successful recipients was considerably greater than that provided through such arm's-length funding. The RISE program was very frank in its support for commercially focused activities, including funding for the Sydney season of the musical *Hamilton*, restarting the Melbourne performances of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* and, perhaps most famously, the Australian concert tour of veteran hard rock band Guns'n'Roses. This eclectic – to put it mildly – approach to new cultural funding appears to have been influenced by the cultural advocacy organisation

A New Approach, whose 2020 report *A View from Middle Australia: Perceptions of Arts, Culture, and Creativity* found that focus groups representing suburban and regional Australians in highly contested electorates ('middle Australia') were considerably more favourably disposed towards the role played by culture than by 'the arts', which they perceived to be elitist and focused on wealthier Australians (A New Approach, 2020).

### **The Five Pillars of *Revive***

The consultation process for Australia's new national cultural policy was a model of timeliness and efficiency. The period from Arts Minister Burke's initial announcement of the intention to develop such a policy to its final release was a mere seven months. Perhaps conscious of the failings of the Rudd and Gillard governments in this regard, where the process of developing a national cultural policy meandered over almost five years, ultimately leaving only three months to implement the commitments arising from the policy before losing office, the Albanese government moved swiftly but effectively through the consultation process.

An important element in steering the consultation process was the articulation of five pillars that underpinned the policy's strategic objectives:

1. *First Nations First*: recognising and respecting the crucial place of First Nations stories at the centre of Australia's arts and culture;
2. *A Place for Every Story*: reflecting the breadth of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture;
3. *Centrality of the Artist*: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating artists as creators;

4. *Strong Cultural Infrastructure*: providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts, culture and heritage;
5. *Engaging the Audience*: making sure our stories connect with people at home and abroad.

The Office for the Arts received over 1200 submissions in response to its Consultation paper outlining the framework, an overwhelming response from a variety of stakeholders primarily in Australia, but also from abroad. Examination of these submissions in January 2023<sup>1</sup> showed a strong mix of not-for-profit organisations, peak bodies and associations, media businesses, cultural and educational institutes, and individual and anonymous submissions. There were 446 submissions from Australian organisations, and a further 7 submissions from US and UK organisations, that were not made anonymously. Further coding of these submissions helps to understand the types of stakeholders that engaged with the development of *Revive* and the major cultural and arts issues that formed the basis of this dialogue.

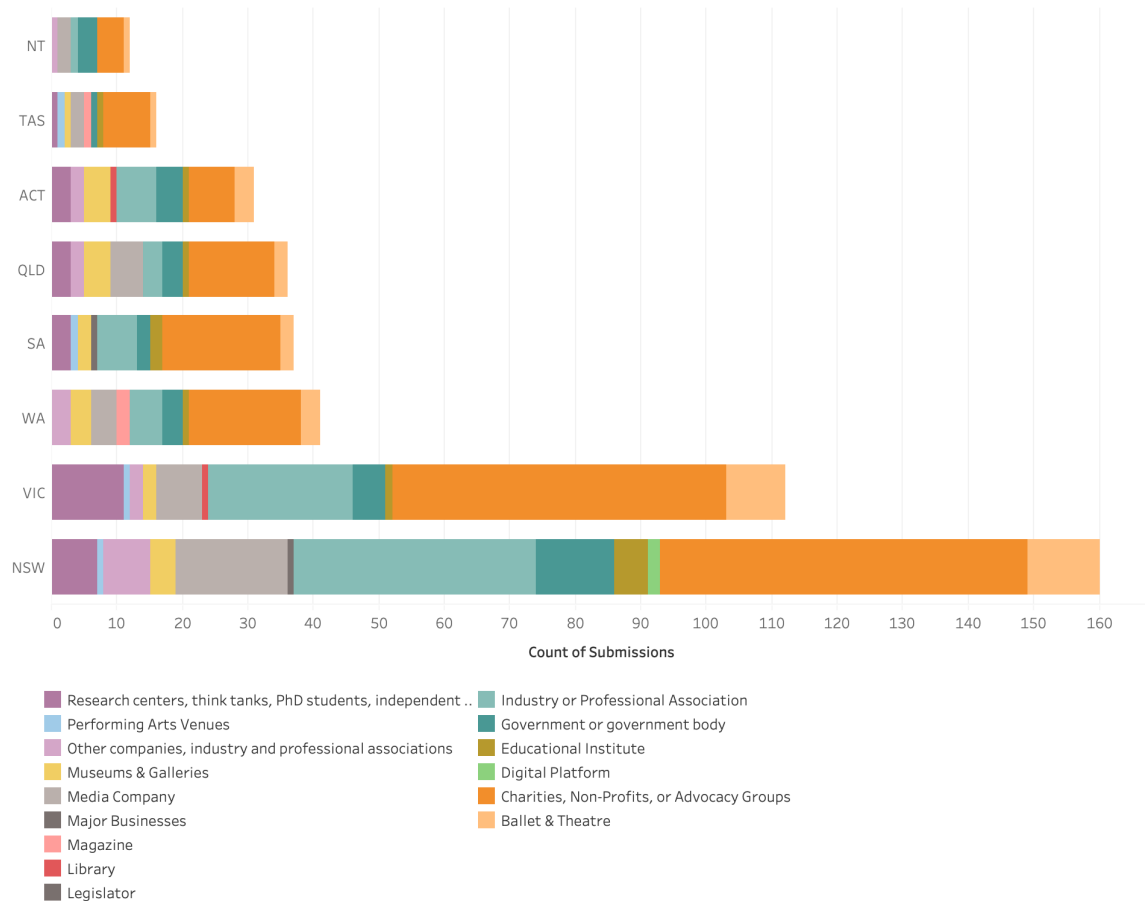
**Table 1: State & Territory Breakdown of Population and Submissions to the Cultural Policy Consultation.**

<i>State/Territory</i>	<i>Percentage of Population (ABS estimates Sep 2022)</i>	<i>Percentage of Submitters to NCPP</i>
------------------------	--	---

<sup>1</sup> At the time of data collection submissions made public through the department website numbered ~900. Some submissions are not made publicly available for confidentiality. To explore the types of submitters and themes, submissions were coded in Excel, visualised in Tableau, and some content analysis conducted on groups of submission in Leximancer.

<i>New South Wales (NSW)</i>	31%	36%
Victoria (VIC)	25%	25%
Queensland (QLD)	21%	8%
Western Australia (WA)	11%	9%
South Australia (SA)	7%	8%
Tasmania (TAS)	2%	4%
Australian Capital Territory (ACT)	2%	7%
Northern Territory (NT)	1%	3%

**Figure 1: Type of Submitter to the National Cultural Policy Consultation by State/Territory.**



From Australian submitters, 376 (84%), came from capital cities across Australia's states and territories, with 70 submissions (16%) from organisations based in non-capital cities and regions. Breaking this down in terms of Australia's states and territories and the type of organisation (see Table 1; Figure 1), the most submissions came from the most populous state of New South Wales at 160 (36%), followed by Victoria at 113 (25%), meaning that 61% of submissions came from the two largest states in the country. Much of their prominence is driven by the fact that many national peak bodies for the arts are headquartered in either Sydney (NSW) or Melbourne (VIC), which inflates the number of submitters from these states. The engagement from stakeholder's from these two states was driven in particular by charities, not-for-profits, and advocacy group organisations such as Diversity Arts Australia from NSW and the Australia Children's Laureate Foundation from VIC, and Industry and Professional Associations with organisations like Screen Producers Australia from NSW and Small Press

Network from VIC. The overperformance of the Australian Capital Territory compared to population is also driven by many national bodies with headquarters in the federal capital of Canberra such as the Law Council of Australia.

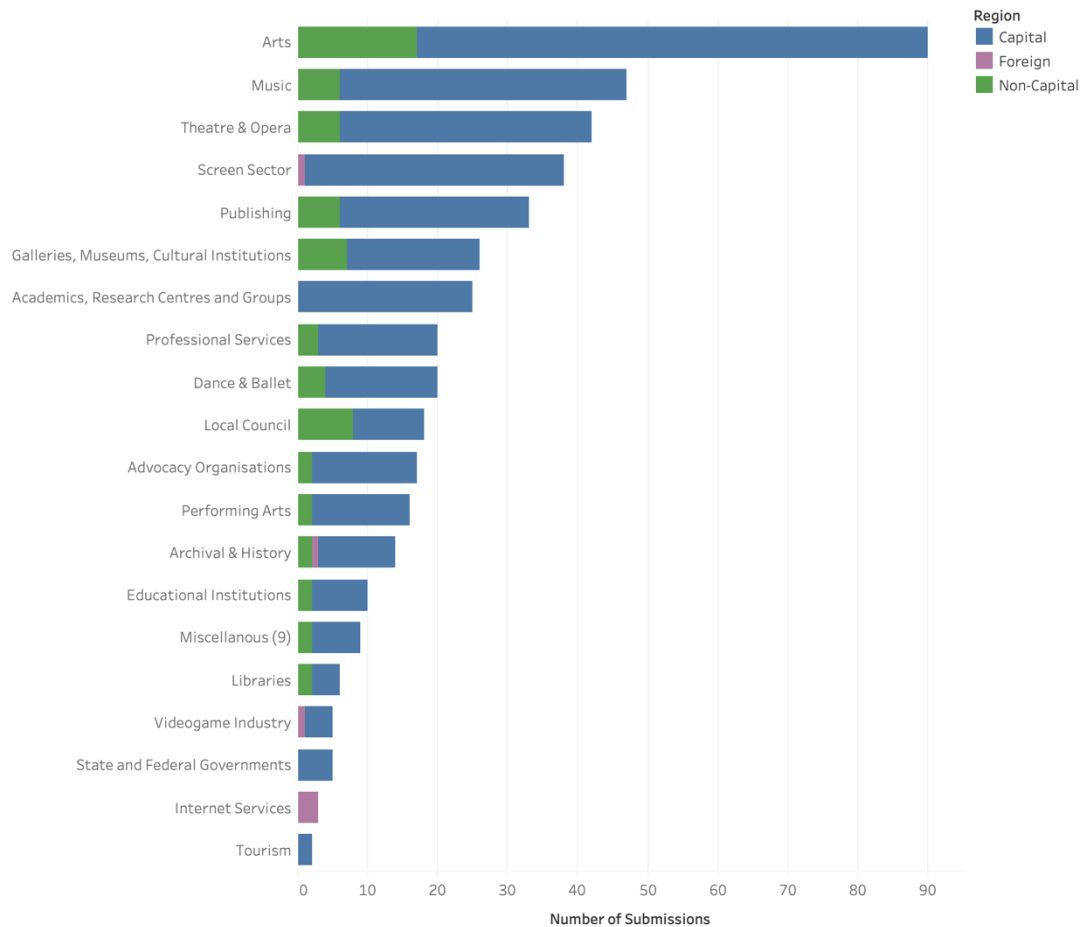
Western Australia was the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest source of submissions at 9%, followed by South Australia, Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory, Tasmania, and the Northern Territory. Given its status as the 4<sup>th</sup> largest State and both culturally and geographically far removed from the major East coast population hubs of Australia, Western Australia's strong presence compared to the third largest state of QLD as a source of submitters was notable. In May 2022, the Australian Labor Party won election on the back of the highest ever vote for the party in Western Australia, once a traditional liberal party and conservative stronghold – the resulting community access from new MPs across in particular Perth may have aided community engagement in the West. Conversely, there was a clear weakness in proportions of submissions from Queensland despite being the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest state. QLD is well known as the Australian state with most decentralised population, with around half of the state's residents living outside the capital city of Brisbane.

The department lists that Arts Minister Tony Burke held 14 town hall style events across Australia in July and August 2022, the tip of the iceberg for a stakeholder engagement blitz which was meant to encourage engagement with the development of the plan and raise awareness of the submission period. Three of these events were held in NSW, two each in Victoria, QLD, and WA, one on the NSW and Victorian border, and one a piece in the ACT, Tasmania, NT, and South Australia. Despite a population around twice as large, QLD was visited for the same number of town hall events as WA.

Looking further at the type of arts industry or organisation focused on by each submitter, it became clear that there was strong engagement across arts, music, theatre, publishing, and screen sectors as the top 5 areas submitting to the consultation (see Figure 2).

The screen sector has been no stranger to a range of submissions and inquiries in Australia across recent years, driven by cultural policy challenges arising from the rapid growth of streaming services. Communications Minister Michelle Rowland described a certain “submission fatigue” amongst the screen sector given this recent history, yet the screen industry still featured prominently in the submissions to this plan, across a range of professional associations like Screen Producers Australia, production companies like Goalpost Pictures, and digital platforms like Amazon and Netflix. Submissions from the screen industry highlighted prominent issues already flagged in prior processes such as the importance of federal production support through tax incentives and rebates as well as the need to further invest in development of physical infrastructure for productions and capacity building for Australian crews.

**Figure 2: Area of Focus of Australian and International Submitters.**



Despite not receiving the same level of ongoing policy attention as the screen sector in recent years, the performing arts sector and areas like music, theatre, and dance and the publishing industry was another strong source of submissions for the National Cultural Policy plan. For the publishing sector, there was a focus on the precarious funding situations for authors with renewed calls for additional funding from bodies like the Australia Council, and the need for cooperation between different governmental funding bodies to increase efficiency.

With the videogame industry being an important ongoing policy priority and a historically underdeveloped area of policy compared to film and television, the National Cultural Policy plan was looking to expand upon the cultural support for the games industry. Despite this, only five submissions were received from the videogames industry. Major global games developer

and publisher Electronic Arts (EA) submitted as did the peak Australian body Interactive Games & Entertainment Association (IGEA) alongside a small publisher and two games advocacy groups, with a focus on precarious work conditions and the need for increased government funding of videogame development.

As well as engagement from State Governments, Federal and State agencies, and a range of political parties, there were 18 submissions from local councils across Australia, including joint submissions from councils in similar areas, with just under half of council submissions coming from regional councils. Major touchpoints for councils included discussion of the physical infrastructure challenges for arts organisations and how councils can facilitate spaces for arts within their local communities through community halls, parks, and libraries, as well as the necessity for greater funding of these ventures.

One of the driving forces of the consultation was the integral role Indigenous arts and storytelling plays and must play in Australia's cultural policy future. The centrality of this was embodied through the first pillar of the plan – *First Nations First*. Responding to this focus was commonplace across the organisational submissions. Submissions themselves from identified Indigenous organisations numbered 21 (5%) of Australian organisational submissions. Within these submissions there was a focus on performing arts, arts and craft, cultural and linguistic services, and professional development opportunities. Indigenous identified organisations highlighted the importance of Indigenous stories and culture, the need for specialised training and development opportunities, and the importance of foregrounding accessibility to these schemes when considering the access Indigenous artists and communities may have.

The policy makes commitments to the arts and culture that total \$286 million over four years.

Among the key policy announcements are:

- Replacement of the current Australia Council with a new agency, Creative Australia, to be the Government's principal arts investment and advisory body;
- Creation of Music Australia and Writers Australia as new bodies within Creative Australia to oversee all activities related to contemporary music and literature;
- A dedicated First Nations-led Board within the newly established Creative Australia to ensure that priorities and funding decisions of First Nations artists are determined by First Nations leaders;
- A new \$80m National Aboriginal Art Gallery in Alice Springs, NT and \$50m towards an Aboriginal Cultural Centre in Perth, WA, to be co-funded by the Western Australian state government;
- Establishment of a Centre for Arts and Entertainment Workplaces to advise on issues of pay, safety and welfare in the arts and entertainment sectors, and to develop codes of conduct for employment and workplace standards in the sector;
- Introduction of a Digital Games Tax Offset to support large-scale games development in Australia, and support for digital games developers and small to medium independent games studios through Screen Australia;
- The introduction of new requirements for Australian screen content on streaming platforms, to be determined by the Minister of Communication in consultation with the Minister for the Arts;
- The reintroduction of five-year funding terms for the ABC and SBS, and the reinstatement of indexation for ABC funding.

Implementation and evaluation of the policies arising out of *Revive* are to be informed by ten principles:

- First Nations arts and culture are First Nations led.
- All Australians, regardless of language, literacy, geography, age or education, have the opportunity to access and participate in arts and culture.
- Artists and arts workers have career structures that are long-term and sustainable, and supported by vocational pathways.
- Australian students have the opportunity to receive an education that includes culture, creativity, humanities and the arts.
- Creative talent is nurtured through fair remuneration, industry standards and safe and inclusive work cultures.
- Arts and cultural organisations have representation and leadership that is reflective of contemporary Australia.
- Cultural infrastructure, including galleries, venues, theatres, libraries, museums, archives and digital collections, is restored, built and maintained.
- Australian stories are seen and heard, regardless of platform.
- Creative industries and practice are future focused, technology enabled, networked and globally recognised, including through reciprocal exchange, export and cultural diplomacy.
- Arts and culture are both generative (creating new works and supporting emerging artists) and preservative (protecting heritage and conserving cultural memory) (Australian Government, 2023, p.19).

## **Evaluating *Revive*: Opportunities, Gaps and Future Possibilities**

Keen observers of cultural policy documents in Australia and elsewhere will have noted that the *Revive* program makes fewer references to the creative industries than other comparable documents. The term “creative industries” is used ten times in *Revive*, as compared to 73 appearances in the 2013 *Creative Australia* document. Moreover, there is a shift in how the term is being used. With the exception of the screen and games industries, which are definitely seen as creative industries that make use of digital technologies and whose development drives employment, innovation and exports (p. 85), the discussion is more about democratising the creative industries (p. 13), lived experience in the arts and creative industries (p. 44), and career paths in the creative industries (p. 52). This is not only a change in nomenclature over the course of a decade. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communication and the Arts’ 2021 report, *Sculpting a National Cultural Plan* (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts, 2021), framed its Terms of Reference around the economic benefits of the creative and cultural industries on the one hand, and the non-economic benefits on the other.

A few factors can be identified as lying behind such a change in focus. There have been strong voices in both the academic and creative communities that have been opposed to both creative industries terminology and the measurement of cultural outcomes using economic indicators, such as Justin O’Connor, Julian Meyrick, Jo Caust, Julianne Schultz and Tully Barnett (Meyrick et al., 2018; O’Connor, 2016; Phiddian et al., 2017), and submissions such as those from Reset Arts and Culture (ncp0334), Currency House (ncp1078) and ArtsPay (ncp1274) represented these positions.

Within the arts sector itself, there has been a degree of uncoupling from broader data about the creative industries and the creative economy: the progressive think-tank The Australia Institute was commissioned to undertake a study into the size of the arts and entertainment economy, which it saw as a subset of the cultural and creative industries (Browne, 2020). The very different experiences of the arts and screen sectors in Australia during the COVID-19 lockdowns were also significant. While the COVID period was a very adverse one for the arts generally, and the performance-related fields in particular (Pennington & Eltham, 2021), screen production flourished during this period, due to a combination of very generous tax incentives for offshore producers and the relatively COVID-safe work environment Australia offered during this period. The term “Aussiewood” came to be used to refer to highly generic content often generated for global streaming services but shot in Australian locations.

Finally, there was an important shift in the rhetoric of arts advocacy, associated with the thinktank A New Approach and with the former CEO of the Grattan Institute, John Daley, where it was argued that politicians and bureaucrats were basically unconvinced by economic arguments for the value of arts and culture. Daley argued that by focusing on economic arguments, arts advocacy was not playing to its strengths:

It’s an argument made by people who don’t believe it to people who don’t believe it ...  
How many artists does anyone know who do what they do because it contributes to the national economy? Yet advocates keep leading with economic arguments that few of the industry’s participants actually believe in (John Daley, quoted in Burke, 2021).

What is distinctive about *Revive* is its focus upon arts and creative workers. Under the pillar of “The centrality of the artist” – which could have invoked a Brandis-like focus upon artistic

excellence as the primary goal of cultural policy – there is a sustained focus on the incomes, working conditions and career pathways that face both creators and those who work in activities and industries that support creative activity. It is noted that:

Too often artists have not been considered real workers, arts businesses have not been considered real businesses, and arts training courses have not been considered as training for real jobs (Australian Government, 2023, p. 52).

The range of initiatives around minimum rates of pay, industry codes of practice, award coverage, sexual harassment and workplace health and safety, as well as the establishment of a Centre for Arts and Entertainment Workplaces within Creative Australia, give *Revive* a distinctive focus upon issues of justice, equity and rights for those working in arts and culture. This points to the effectiveness of sustained advocacy on the part of unions and others concerned with the conditions of cultural work.

The other distinctive feature of *Revive* as a national cultural policy is its focus on First Nations First. While this involves a series of funding and infrastructure commitments for first nations artists and cultural organisations, it points to a deeper centrality of First Nations cultures in Australian cultural identity. The idea that the cultural policy is framed around ‘a place for every story, a story for every place’ points to something more than the need for equitable regional distribution of cultural funding, although it does also point to that. The principle behind First Nations First and its relationship to Indigenous conceptions of country is articulated in the Preamble by the Minister for the Arts, Tony Burke MP, in these terms:

This National Cultural Policy is not a conclusion. It is the next chapter in a story that stretches back to the first sunrise on our continent. The story starts with art, dance, narrative and songlines. It has been built upon by generations of First Nations artists. At its heart it recognises there is a place for every story and a story for every place. It has been added to as cultures and artists from all parts of the world have also come to call our continent and its islands home (Australian Government, 2023, p. 6).

The Minister for Indigenous Australians, and Wiradjuri woman, Linda Burney, described the First Nations relationship to culture in the following terms:

For First Nations peoples, culture is more than just visual and performing arts, it includes language, stories, songlines, sacred sites and traditional knowledge. Culture is the sum of all things, the essence of our being. Connection to culture is integral for the health and wellbeing of First Nations peoples, to our sense of identity, and to maintaining the vitality and strength of our communities. *Revive* recognises the breadth of our culture and respects the central place of culture in our lives (Australian Government, 2023, p. 8).

This year 2023 is not dominated in Australia by debates about national cultural policy. The *Revive* statement and the policy measures associated with it are broadly supported by the loose alliance of Greens and independent MPs and Senators – including the ‘teal’ independents won seats previously held by the Liberals on a platform of climate justice and social liberalism – and much of the legislation associated with *Revive* can be expected to pass through the Parliament. The political agenda is, however, importantly framed by the referendum that will take place in the second half of 2023 on constitutional reform to establish an Aboriginal and

Torres Straits Islander Voice to Parliament. The First Nations First commitments in *Revive* need to be framed in the context of the Voice proposal, which is itself the outcome of deliberation among First Nations People from across Australia that led to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, first promulgated in 2017.

Cultural policy has its historical roots in nation-building. In one interpretation, the first acts of national cultural policy were the measures to confiscate the art works of the nobility and clergy during the French Revolution, to make such works the property of the people to be held in the *Musée du Louvre* when it commenced as a public museum in 1793 (Flew, 2012). Cultural policies sit alongside a range of other policies that impact upon cultural activity, ranging from education policies to trade policy to laws and policies concerning intellectual property and moral rights (Throsby, 2010). There are recurring debates in this field, such as the relative significance to be attached to economic factors in framing cultural policy – of which the creative industries debates have been the most recent manifestation (Flew, 2019) – the scope of a cultural policy beyond the arts, and the balance between governmental policies and bottom-up cultural initiatives (Oakley & Bell, 2015). With *Revive*, an additional dimension is introduced to national cultural policy, which concerns the nation to which it speaks. For those nations that have their historical roots in colonialist ventures, such as Australia, these questions point to a cultural reckoning that goes beyond the familiar questions of who should pay for the arts and culture, and the ends and extent of government subvention of culture.

## References

- A New Approach. (2019). *The Big Picture: Public Expenditure on Artistic, Cultural and Creative Activity in Australia* (Insight Research Series) [Report One]. Australian Academy of the Humanities.
- A New Approach. (2020). *A View from Middle Australia: Perceptions of Arts, Culture, and Creativity* (Insight Research Series No. 3). A New Approach.
- Australian Government. (2013). *Creative Australia: National Cultural Policy*. Australian Government.
- Australian Government. (2023). *Revive: A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place*. Commonwealth of Australia.
- Beilharz, P. (1994). *Transforming Labor: Labour Tradition and the Labor Decade in Australia*. Cambridge University Press.
- Brett, J. (2005). *Relaxed and Comfortable: The Liberal Party's Australia*. Schwartz Books.
- Browne, B. (2020). *Art vs Dismal Science: The economics of Australia's creative arts sector*. The Australia Institute.
- Burke, K. (2021, June 19). Change the conversation: Why Australia's arts advocates need a new approach. *The Guardian*.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2021/jun/19/change-the-conversation-why-australias-arts-advocates-need-a-new-approach>
- Craik, J. (2007). *Re-Visioning Arts and Cultural Policy: Current Impasses and Future Directions*. ANU e-Press.
- Eltham, B. (2016). *When the Goal Posts Move: Patronage, Power and Resistance in Australian Cultural Policy 2013-2016*. Currency House.

- Flew, T. (2012). *The Creative Industries, Culture and Policy*. SAGE.
- Flew, T. (2019). Creative Industries: Between cultural economics and cultural studies. In *Research Agenda for the Creative Industries*. Edward Elgar.
- House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts. (2021). *Sculpting a National Cultural Plan: Igniting a post-COVID economy for the arts*. Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia.
- Johnson, C. (2000). *Governing Change: From Keating to Howard*. University of Queensland Press.
- MacDonnell, J. (1992). *Arts, Minister?: Government policy and the arts*. Currency Press.
- Meyrick, J., Phiddian, R., & Barnett, T. (2018). *What Matters? Talking Value in Australian Culture*. Monash University Publishing.
- Oakley, K., & Bell, D. (2015). *Cultural Policy*. Routledge.
- O'Connor, J. (2016). *Why we Need a Cultural Economy*. Currency House.
- Pennington, A., & Eltham, B. (2021). *Creativity in Crisis: Rebooting Australia's Arts and Entertainment Sector After COVID*. The Australia Institute.
- Phiddian, R., Meyrick, J., Barnett, T., & Maltby, R. (2017). Counting culture to death: An Australian perspective on culture counts and quality metrics. *Cultural Trends*, 26(2), 174–180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2017.1324014>
- “The Political Attack On The Arts Over,” New Minister For The Arts Tony Burke Makes First Statement. (2022, June 2). *The Music*.
- Throsby, D. (2008). Modelling the Cultural Industries. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 14(3), 217–232.
- Throsby, D. (2010). *The Economics of Cultural Policy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Throsby, D., Beal, S., Bott, J., & Tofts, D. (2006). *Does Australia need a cultural policy?* Currency Press.

---

<sup>1</sup> The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gough Whitlam's 1972 election victory saw a diverse range of commemorative events take place in December, from a plenary session at the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia's annual conference at RMIT university in Melbourne, a series of events hosted by the Whitlam Institute at Western Sydney University including a commemoration of the Whitlam family home in Cabramatta, Sydney, and a Sino-Australian High-level Dialogue Forum on Culture and Humanities at Shanghai Jiao Tong University in China. The latter celebrated Whitlam being the first Australian Prime Minister to visit China, which he did shortly after his election.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that support for the screen industries, as distinct from direct funding to the arts, remained generous at both State and Federal levels through this period. In particular, a range of tax and other incentives were offered for international film companies to produce films in Australia, leading to the phrase "Aussiewood" being coined to describe films made in Australia but are ostensibly based somewhere else. The Baz Luhrmann-produced *Elvis*, where the Gold Coast and South-East Queensland doubles for the American South, is a notable example.